

A FEW

[2nd. Ed.]

Friendly Hints,

to them who affirm 4401 44
that private Christians ought never to meddle
with Politics.

BRITISH
MUSEUM

They that forsake the law [of God] praise the wicked [governors:] but such as keep the law contend with them.--- For as a roaring Lion and a ravening Bear, so is a wicked Ruler over the poor people.---yea, the foolish Prince is also a great oppressor. *Prov. 28. 4, 15, 16.*

Ye shall be brought before Governors and Kings [for preaching the truth] for a testimony [witness] against them [i.e. against their wicked laws and practices.] and be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that can do no more.--- but go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel [the truth, or law of righteousness and peace] to EVERY CREATURE.--- For without [personal] holiness [justice, mercy, humility, self denial, love, &c.] NO MAN shall see the Lord. *Matt. 10. 18. Mark 13. 9. and 16. 15. Luke 12. 4. Heb. 12. 14.*

Wo unto them that make unrighteous Laws! *Isa. 10. 1. 2.*

HAVING often heard it asserted by some who make a great profession of religion, both preachers and hearers, that a private christian has no business with politics; I think it my duty thus publicly to contribute my mite towards the better information of some, who I believe thus oppose the truth ignorantly; as well as to confute others who speak thus either through fear or covetousness.

And first, what is *Politics*?---I answer, the theory, or art, and practice of government.

Now with respect to the theory, or science, the same book or law which contains the rule of conduct for a private christian, contains that also for a King, or Senator; and with respect to practice the Bible also holds out the rewards and punishments of the great, as well as the small; so that it is impossible for a man faithfully to search the Scriptures, but he must see the duty and danger of the governors, as well as of the governed.

Such passages as these, "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, be not deceived, neither

fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, &c. &c. have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God." 1 Cor. 6. 9. Gal. 5. 21. Eph. 5. 5.

Again, " All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Matt. 7. 12. Luke 6. 31.

Again, " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Matt. 19. 19.

And, " Come ye blessed,---or, depart ye cursed, &c." Matt. 25. 34---46. I say these, and multitudes of similar passages throughout the Scriptures, belong equally to the King and the Subject.

Now suppose a King or Senate should, in order to raise a revenue, or to gratify their pride and pleasure, or partly for all these purposes, countenance, suffer, or connive at whoredom, gaming, playhouses, lotteries, drunkenness, horse-racing, cock-fighting, hunting, electioneering, excessive expences in obtaining necessary justice by law, &c. &c. may not these things when sanctioned by government be very properly called *politics*? and when you warn your hearers against whoredom, cards, plays, lotteries, or ruinous courts of law, &c. do not you meddle with politics, and charge the *higher powers* with sin or folly?

Again, suppose a wicked King (and God knows there have been MANY such) should command one part of his subjects called Catholics, to murder another part of his subjects called Hugonots; because they could not believe that a wicked man was holy;---or suppose a Queen and parliament should command one man to burn another to death, because he cou'd not believe, and therefore wou'd not say, that flour and water was flesh and blood;---I say, if these things were now occurring, do you think it would be the duty of French or Englishmen to obey such orders (as the subjects of Louis the 14th, and Mary did) because they came from government, and therefore might properly be called *politics*?---No, I have no doubt but you will readily say, that it was the duty of every christian to refuse obedience to such orders; and further, to deliver his own soul, by publicly testifying against them, and thereby endeavouring to save both the oppreffer and the oppressed.

Well then, you acknowledge that in *some* cases it may be the duty of private christians to talk about *politics* ; that is, about the plans and practices of government ; and you shudder with horror at the thoughts of the hundreds who were then murdered in England, and the thousands afterwards in France.---But now, to come home with the argument, if I believe mens lives, liberties, and properties to be as valuable *at this time* as they were *then*, and that the Allies can give no better reasons for the present **TEN-FOLD** carnage and devaftation than Louis and Mary did then,---I fay, if I am *fully persuaded* of this, and find myself compell'd to be a supporter of the *butchery* ; is it not a duty which I owe both to God and man to remonstrate against it now, as the French and English martyrs did formerly ?

Further, if I suppose that a righteous, Almighty Judge sees and governs the earth, even the greatest as well as the minutest transactions in it, [no matter whether *personally*, or by *agency*] and I see a government over me, like that which existed at the memorable plague and fire of London ;---on the one hand, drowned in pride, pleasure, covetousness, and idolatry ; and on the other hand quenching the spirit of reproof, by the iron rod of oppression,---if I believe, according to the tenor of the Scriptures, that wars, debts, plagues, famine, fire, earthquakes, storms, murmurings, insurrections, &c. are the instruments or scourges of God's justice, can I *honestly* hold my peace at such a time ?

If Moses and the Prophets in the old Testament, * and Christ and his Apostles in the New, * had been as complaisant to the *powers* of their days, as the Dissenters and Methodists in general are now, I have no doubt but the Kings and Rulers, even from Pharaoh to Herod, or still further even to Domitian, wou'd have been as civil to them (except perhaps a particular monster or two) as our government is to the English Pharisees of the present day.---and if a renewal of the spirit and conduct of George Fox and his brethren was again to take place.

** But they were griev'd at, and continually remonstrated against the excessive rents, duties, taxes, hardships, and cruelties, which the rich laid upon the poor, in order to support their pride, luxury, covetousness, &c.

among the Quakers, with a willingness to advance into the whole council of God, and to rectify any errors or imperfections in their present doctrine or practice ; I say, in this case I am persuaded they would quickly find the business of fines and imprisonments, &c. going forward, as in the times of Cromwell and Charles the IIId.---for pride, covetousness, superstition, pleasure, luxury, and oppression would no more brook the true spirit of Jesus Christ at this time, than in the days of Henry, Mary, Cromwell, or Charles. May the good God speedily send among us such a measure of the truth as it is in Jesus, as shall turn the present Laodicean state of things upside-down, both in rulers and Subjects !*

Suppose the ancient Greeks and Romans paid respect, reverence, or love to the pictures or statues of some great or good men, as the Roman Catholics do now,---or if even to a Mars, a Bacchus, a Venus, a Psyche, or a Plutus,---will not the oppression, drunkennes, whoredom, pleasures, or covetousnes of an English *Christian* (so called) even tho' he were a King or a Prince, as certainly damn *him*, as the idolatry of ancient or modern Rome did, or does damn *them* ?---and therefore is it not the duty of British preachers now to testify against the destroying sins, instituted or connived at by an English King and Parliament, as it was the duty and practice of the primitive christians to testify against the idolatries instituted by the Emperors and Senate of Rome, even though death or banishment, &c. should be the consequence now as it often was formerly ?

The Briton who wilfully or deliberately drinks to excess, as truly sacrifices to Bacchus ; the whoremaster and man of pleasure, to Venus and Psyche ; the covetous man, to Plutus ; and the promoter of unnecessary war, to Mars ; as ever these devils in human shape were sacrificed to by the old Greeks, or Romans : and yet, strange and horrible ! our *modern* idolaters are called christians ; yea, *most religious and gracious* ! while many less blameable, and more worthy *ancient* idolaters and philosophers

* But certainly, the reformation of the *first*, is most important ; for whether the King goes to St. Paul's, or the opera-house, the people will be with him, even at the expence of their pockets, or the r ilk of their lives !

are, under the name of pagans, consigned by the same preachers to everlasting torments! --- but I believe that many of the latter, tho' called heathens, will be accounted worthy of immortality, when the names of many great nominal christians, will be found written only in the sand, and the memory of them perish for ever. --- The Lord is a God of judgment; by Him **ACTIONS** are weighed, and *mere* professions abhorred.

The grand hinge upon which all the books of the Old and New Testaments turn, is, DO GOOD, --- according to your ability, whether it extend to supply the wants of your fellow-creatures for the body, or mind, or both: and tho' God doth not always immediately give such success to the endeavours of his servants, as they wish and hope; yet however, I do not recollect any instance from Moses even to the present time, of great, general good taking place, without the instrumentality of some zealous, faithful labourer. When *many run to and fro*, then it is that knowledge is increased.

With respect to the prophets and preachers of the Old Testament, their interference in politics, that is, in the conduct of Kings and Rulers, is so often repeated, that I suppose no man of common sense and common honesty will deny it: but it seems to be the notion of many religious professors in this day, that the MORAL, or righteous practice of instructing, warning, reproofing, rebuking, or denouncing Kings, Princes, Senators, and Judges was abolished by Christ along with the Mosaic law of rites and ceremonies, such as circumcision, washing, eating, touching, &c.

Now as to Christ himself, we shou'd remember that he was sent more especially to the Jewish nation, and is therefore call'd a minister of the circumcision; so that it seems rather out of his province to meddle with the Roman government: but with respect to the Jewish rulers, I don't know that any of the old testament prophets were more severe than he was. --- Jeremiah seems to rank one of the Kings of Judah with an *Ass*, or at least

least intimates that he should come to such an end and deserved no better burial than that animal ; and Christ compares the Jewish King who reign'd in his time to a *Fox*, which in my opinion is a much more hateful, worthless creature than the former. I believe only a small part of what Christ said and did is recorded in the Evangelists, otherwise we shou'd perhaps have heard of other severe animadversions upon Herod : now as he was the King or civil governor, so the High-Priest, and chief Priests, were the Archbishop and Bishops, or *Spiritual Lords*.---and as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, &c. set their main artillery against the polluted priests, false prophets, and hireling preachers of them days (as professing more knowledge and holiness, and flattering wicked kings) so did Christ against the pride, covetousness, superstition, and oppression of the Hierarchy, or established church-government of his time.---The terms serpents, vipers, hypocrites, blind guides, whitened walls, painted sepulchres, children of murderers, devourers of the poor, &c. appear to me as plain, clear, full, and unequivocal as any of the epithets, charges, or denunciations of the former prophets.

Again, with respect to the preaching and writings of the Apostles after the day of Pentecost, we see their plain-dealing at *Jerusalem*, recorded *Acts 2. 23.* and *3. 14, 15.* and *4. 27.* and *7. 51, 52.*---and after their dispersion they went through *all countries* teaching, exhorting, and warning the people every where to forsake the national religions by law established ; as *Acts 14. 15.* and *17. 6, 7, 16---31.* and *19. 26, 27.*&c.---Now *Church and State* were as closely united in Italy, Greece, and Syria, then, as they are at this time in England ; and therefore in preaching against idolatry, the Apostles must as necessarily clash with the civil governments as Luther did in Germany, or George Fox in England ; when the former preached against indulgencies, and the latter against tythes : and I suppose it was a foresight of this which made Christ so repeatedly tell his disciples, that they should be brought before *Kings and Rulers* ; as witnesses against their pride, oppression, covetousness, idolatry, &c. of which he warned them that they might be

be prepared for it, and not be shaken, as by something strange or unexpected.†

With respect to the particular conduct of Kings and Rulers *among Christians*, Christ gives us a plain rule and example, as Moses, Samuel, and other prophets had formerly done for the *Jewish Kings*. When ye shall determine to elect a King over you, says Moses, ye shall in any wise set up him whom the Lord your God shall chuse, [that is, a bold, just, wise, good, humble man] and he shall not be a foreigner, but one of thy brethren. Further, when elected he shall not keep many horses [which devour the land] neither shall he have many wives ; nor possess much gold and silver. And he shall write him a copy of this law---that he may keep and read it---that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, [whether rich or poor] but administer justice impartially. Deut. 17, 14, 20.---At the conclusion of Samuel's administration or government, we find him appealing to his conduct (which is stronger than *precept*) in this manner, whom have I defrauded ? whom have I oppressed ? or of whom have I received any bribe ? and the people answered, thou hast not defrauded nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. 1 Sam. 12. 3---5 Again, we find David speaking thus, The God of Israel said to me---he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear [obedience] of God. 2 Sam. 23. 3. Again, Prov. 31. 1---9. It is not for Kings to drink wine, or Princes strong drink, lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of [delay, oppress, refuse to hear or righten] any of the afflicted. [whether rich or poor] but on the contrary, open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause [redress the wrongs] of the oppressed, the poor, and the needy. As for the instructions, commands, and threatenings to Kings and Rulers in the *subsequent prophets*, they occur in almost every page ; and are much too numerous for insertion here, altho' of the same authority as the words of Moses, Samuel, David, or Solomon

We see, therefore, that the ancient Kings and Rulers of God's chosen people were not left to act as they chose,

† We find that though John reproved Herod for all his evil doings (Luke 3. 19.) yet none of the Evangelists gives the least intimation that John was to blame for taking that freedom, but the contrary.

but were bound by a law given for their own *particular* conduct, as well as by the general laws (whether moral or ceremonial) which were indiscriminately binding upon the *whole nation*, Kings as well as Subjects; and in cases of disobedience, we find that God not only punished them by plague and famine, or by bringing the swords of the neighbouring nations upon them, † but He sometimes raised up even *their own subjects and servants* to chastise them; as in the cases of *Jehu*, and *Jeroboam*: no doubt, both these men were convinced in their consciences of the departure of their sovereigns from the law of God, and did not act from a *blind impulse*.

If we examine the *new testament*, we shall there, also, find a rule or law for *christian Kings and Rulers*.—Ye know (says Christ to his Apostles) that the Kings and Princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them; [exact service, duties, customs, homage, &c.] but *among you* it shall not be so, but whosoever will be great [a King, senator, bishop, elder, &c.] among you, let him be your minister: and *whoever will be chief among you*, let him be your Servant. **EVEN AS I** came not to be served, [waited on, or worked for by others,] but to serve; and to spend my life for the *good of others*.

Matt. 20. 25.-28. Luke 22. 25.-27.—Now I look upon the words **AMONG YOU** to signify the *whole* of any collected body of *real christians*, whether the community consist of 12, or of 12000, or of 12000000, &c.—And tho' a King should be perfuaded that many of his subjects are *not* real christians, but on the contrary very wicked, that is not a reason why he (being a *christian himself*) should take from them (and much less from the *good*) a revenue to spend in grandeur, pleasure, and luxury, &c. No doubt, God and His Christ fore-knew that there wou'd one day be nations and Kings of christians (I mean *professing christians*) yet we find no other law in the gospel for their conduct, than the words of Christ quoted above. No mention made about grand

† How constantly do we find that the folly or wickedness of their Kings, Judges, or Priests brought a snare and a rod upon the nation!—and does not the British government at this time seem to pity and lament the present state of the French nation upon the same account, bid governors?—but, alas, if we talk of searching out, or reforming abuses at home, —disaffection—sedition—rebellion—transposition!—but it is now time for those that do evil, to bear the lights.

palaces and thrones, ornamented temples, great riches, &c. as was to Solomon under the mosaic dispensation: no, these are among the things which the Son of God took out of the way, and nail'd to his cross; and the command by Paul, "that women adorn (or rather clothe) themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, and *NOT* with broidered [or ribbon'd, curl'd, powdered,] hair, or gold, or jewels," belongs to the wife of a Gentleman, Lord, or King, as well as to the wife of the meanest mechanic. What is it but the demands of pride, luxury, pleasure, idleness and covetousness, &c. that fills the world with wars, rapine, blood-shed, famine, groans, and curses! (James 4. 1.) and turns the garden of Eden into a howling wilderness?—+ justly therefore is the law of Christ call'd *good news*, even with respect to its influence in abolishing and destroying these works of darkness, and thus producing temporal happiness, and *peace upon earth*: though certainly the gospel witness of regeneration and immortality, as far exceeds *any earthly* happiness, as the whole world does a grain of dust, or a Newton, an insect.

When Paul says (Romans 13. 1. 7.) "let every soul be subject to the higher powers," it is evident he must be understood with a reservation of our first subjection or obedience to God; or else he wou'd condemn the practice of all the prophets and preachers both of the old and new testaments, and his own among the rest. In the above words I understand the Apostle to mean, first, that in case of religious persecution, *private* christians ought not to rise up in arms against the *higher powers*, (i. e. the government, whether it be a Monarchy, an Aristocracy, a Democracy, or a mixture of all.)— But either to flee, or else patiently suffer; committing their cause to God: and secondly, that we ought to yield positive and faithful obedience to *every ordinance of Man* (as Peter words it) *for the Lord's sake*: that is, to every *good* law. But from the scope of the whole passage, 1.-7. I am inclin'd to think that it was wrote at a time when the Roman government was equitable and good; for they

+ This kingdom, I am persuaded, would *well* maintain **TEN** times its present inhabitants, if superfluities were abolished, and the land and its produce properly cultivated and made use of.

had several such seasons during the reigns of the Emperors, & even Nero himself was a good Prince for some years in the beginning of his supremacy; perhaps therefore it wou'd not be wrong to read the 3rd verse thus, "for our present [or, good] rulers are not a terror, &c." no doubt, our translators have many times supplied words of as much, or greater importance. We certainly can't believe that a persecuting Domitian, Louis, or Mary would praise or protect them whom they were putting to death for what they called rebellion or heresy: neither can we believe that all the governments or *higher powers*, that are now, or ever were upon earth, are in such sense the ordinance or will of God, as that every real christian *subject* ought to yield either active or passive obedience to them. The Scriptures abound with sayings "hard to be understood," and with parabolical expressions and dark sentences which if literally or unlimitedly taken, would contradict other *plain* parts of Scripture, as well as reason and experience. In the above sense I understand that saying of Christ, Matt. 26. 52. as meaning that all should be cut off who would obstinately fight in his defence *at that time*.---To us, says Paul, there is but one Supreme, the Father; and one Lord, or Lawgiver, Jesus Christ [to be obeyed before all others;] and in another place he tells us that his contention was with Princes, Rulers, and chief Priests. 1 Cor. 8. 6. and Eph. 6. 12. and therefore he cannot be supposed to command obedience to all governments, in the utmost extent of the words.

Though all rich men are not kings and senators, yet there are few or none of the latter but what are rich men; therefore when James says, "do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats, &c." and again, "go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you, &c." May we not as justly apply these and similar passages to *ruling* rich men, as to *private* ones? yea, I believe the application is doubly due to the former; because they are not only chargeable with their own particular acts of injustice and oppression; but also their public capacity renders them answerable for a great deal of that which they suffer *private oppressors* to practice.

The truth is, that in this country, at this time, one part of the community is ruined by riches and useless learning, and another part of it by poverty and ignorance;—the former is destroyed by pleasure, luxury, pride, idleness, covetousness and vanity; and the latter by sorrow, hard-labour, oppression, and want of mental and bodily necessaries: and the third, or middle class, is hastily falling off to one or the other of the two first mentioned; both which are alike contrary to truth and righteousness, and the general good and happiness of the community.—Thus the Kingdom of God instead of increasing, flourishing, and gaining ground among us, is continually DECAYING! and what peace (as Jehu answer'd Joram) is to be expected or desired in such a situation?—“If a ruler hearken to lies, says Solomon, all his servants will be wicked;” and therefore when we see whoredom and gameing, &c. winked at and encouraged among the great from political motives, it highly becomes every one that truly fears God *publicly to rebuke and protest against such politics.*

We find that the Apostle Paul did not think it contrary to the spirit of truth and christianity, to claim the privileges belonging to him as a citizen of Rome; and by the British Constitution the *Commons* of this Kingdom have a right to elect (annually I believe) from among themselves Representatives to make laws, (as one of the Estates of the Realm) and to allow what money they think necessary for the support of the executive part of the government: now how can they *properly* exercise this right without considering *the state of the nation*, as well as the character and principles of them whom they delegate, or may already have delegated?

We know that many abuses have by degrees crept into the Representation, by the mean ambition of proud, covetous, oppressive men; and also that political conversation is much abused by many, whose chief aim in talking or reading is to gratify their affection for novelty and curiosity, &c. but if the *partial abuse* of a thing was *always* a sufficient reason for the *total abolition* of it, then we ought not only to reject food and raiment, but even the Bible itself.

It is true indeed, that not many learned, or powerful, or noble, or rich men embrace the lowly, mortifying, self-denying call of Jesus Christ: but yet *some* such have had the courage to lose the present for the future, ---things that are seen, for things that are not seen, ---temporary existence, for immortality: and the hope of even a few SUCH FREEMEN from the class of Law-makers, seems to me a matter of great importance.

I am persuaded that if serious, upright men did properly reflect upon the consequences of the determinations and actions of government, then instead of forbidding remonstrances to rulers, they would say, *wou'd God that all the Lord's people were prophets or preachers to them, and that He wou'd pour out His spirit upon them for that purpose.* ---We know that Kings, Counsellors, and Parliaments are *only* men,---always fallible,---often mistaken,---sometimes very foolish and wicked.

Suppose a government resolves for war,---whether it act from misinformation,---from mistaken notions of right and wrong;---or from downright proud, covetous, cruel principles,---in either case the consequences are as burdensome and fatal to the subject, as if the war was just and unavoidable:---and who can trace out all the horrid effects of war!---the cursing, swearing, lying, stealing, robbing, fornications, rapes, famine, burnings, starvings, orphans, widows, maimings, murders, &c!---and is it no part of the business of a *peace-maker*,---of a *subject of the King of righteousness and Prince of peace*, to examine whether a war is really just and necessary, and and if not, to use his utmost endeavours to prevent, or put a stop to it?---Again, suppose a government is given to pleasure, idleness, or covetousness, (all have the same bad consequences to the subject) who can properly display the burdens which these evil passions lay upon the poor!---hard-labour, ignorance, drunkenness, poverty, hunger, nakedness, cold, neglect of instruction, sicknes, crimes, imprisonments, immature deaths, transports, hangings, &c. and is it no part of the duty of one who wishes to *turn many to righteousness*, to endeavour to bring the people out of such Egyptian slavery, and to stop the evil effects and influence of such corrupt examples?

That the poor may have time and means and a heart to learn the things which belong to their everlasting peace,

is the will and prayer of
a real friend to both the Tenant & the Landlord.

THOMAS BENT